no more dreaming of the dead

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Summary

Hannibal and Will arrive in Washington in pursuit of a new life, reveling in their togetherness, their otherness, and Will's new place at Hannibal's side.

A timestamp of our Penny Dreadful AU, Little Nightmares

Notes

This is a timestamp written for the winner of our fic giveaway challenge, @victorine! They requested a look in on how Will and Hannibal were getting on after the events of our Penny Dreadful AU, Little Nightmares. Hope you enjoy! xo

It had taken Will two days of their long, draining journey to the States to realize that they were following someone. Hannibal was subtle about it, but his attention - always steadfastly on Will these days - was noticeably adrift.

It still is several days later, though less so, as their carriage pulls up at the place Hannibal has named their new home – which will almost certainly be a surprise to its current occupant. Will has been let in on the secret now, a dossier presented to him the day before their ship disembarked in New York. They've been on the trail of one Roman Fell, an academic in natural sciences, and by all accounts a pompous fool. He's returned from England to his second home in Washington, with plans to take up a new position at the Smithsonian.

The trip to Washington has felt endless even after the relentless rock of the steely Atlantic, and Will is thrumming with the same bone deep exhaustion he's come to equate with hunger in this new life, the colors of the evening seeming dull as they step out onto the sidewalk. He truly hadn't known what to expect when he'd agreed to be the devil's boy, but now he knows: hunger pains, growing pains, and a restlessness that is only sated with a select few things.

He sees Hannibal's appraising look. His lover can probably smell his hunger as well.

"Not much longer," he tells Will. Then, he gestures to the coachman to fetch their bags, and walks Will to the front door. He rings the bell and waits, every inch the fine gentleman.

Beside him, Will becomes aware of a flush radiating off Hannibal, some silent thrill: anticipation. It stokes his own, a rush of adrenaline sweeping away the lethargy. They're linked as always. With his gloved hand, Hannibal delicately pounds the knocker on the great door, and when it opens he immediately smiles.

"I am now the owner of this house," he tells the maid, "you will have our things taken up to the master bedroom, and the evidence of its former occupants removed."

"Please come in, sir," she says automatically, face pleasant but blank.

"Thank you." He shows Will in, and hands off his coat to the maid, who scurries away. The lugging of their bags must cause enough commotion to draw the attention of the man they've been following all this time, Doctor Roman Fell, his grey face paling still at the sight of them.

"What the hell is this?"

Hannibal looks up at him where he's come to the top of the spiral stairs. Roman is visibly petrified, eyes wide with incredulity. He still makes the mistake of meeting Hannibal's gaze.

"Come," Hannibal says simply.

As Roman comes unsteadily down the stairs, Will closes the door behind the footman. No one seems concerned. Will can feel it, if he concentrates: the power that Hannibal exerts, like the moon-tugged tides. It's always intoxicating, awe-inspiring to behold. Hannibal snakes through this home like roots, digging in.

When Roman is within reach, Will watches him go from whole to cleaved open with an almost imperceptible flash of Hannibal's fingers and the blade within them. Will makes a wondering noise, suddenly so aware of his teeth; the neat little fangs that have slowly made themselves known in his reflection. Roman doesn't even fall, just slumps into Hannibal's waiting hands, still gloved, his shirt cuffs impeccably white.

"Will, come closer," he murmurs. Will obliges, eyes going to his lover's face. "Eat," Hannibal urges gently, "and then we'll rest."

Eat. The blood calls sweetly. Will lets himself be dragged down into the murky depths of his hunger, and becomes aware only of the taste of needs being slaked. Hot fluid on his face and hands and chest, Hannibal's hands in his hair.

By the time he's in full control of his faculties, they're somewhere else - upstairs, Will slowly realizes, in a bedroom. He turns in Hannibal's arms, looks up at the beloved face. "I ate enough? Did you?"

"Yes, but you still need to rest." His eyes are warm. "Travelling over water isn't easy for us, you've done well."

Will had been miserable the entire time, not to put too fine a point on it. Taking Doctor Fell, in contrast, had been *so* easy.

"The servants..." he questions.

"Are seeing to our laundry, and have prepared the bed. They know who their masters are now."

"You need to rest too, then," Will says stubbornly. As is so often their habit, their hands magnetize to one another's chests and shoulders, their bodies moving as if in orbit, Will inspecting Hannibal as thoroughly as he does Will.

"Care for the devil..." Hannibal breathes. "Such a singular creature you are, Will."

"And you're the whole world, Hannibal."

His sanguine eyes are soft with emotion, and he reels Will gently closer. "Come and rest with me."

Will closes his eyes and rests his cheek on the familiar chest. Nightmares will never breach these defenses. Steadily, Hannibal undresses him down to his casuals, and when they've washed themselves, he leads him to their new bed, grand and plush and freshly changed. He follows Will in and curls himself around him with the grace of a snake.

Against his chest, he's solid and reassuring, a barrier from the old world Will outgrew. It was hard to come back here to the States, to mentally gird himself for being on his old stomping grounds, but he knows nothing can hurt him here - except Hannibal. And Hannibal chooses not to. Because he's the only thing that can hurt Hannibal, too.

Like he can hear his thoughts, Hannibal combs fingers through his curls, loosening them from their styling. "What haunts you about these lands, my love?"

"I lived on the streets in Louisiana," Will murmurs. "I was never safe."

"You're safe with me."

"I know that," Will replies. "That's why I'm here. I'll know when I'm with you, I'll always belong."

"You do, Will. You have a home with me, always. Not a stray, an orphan, or an opportunity." He leans down to give Will a soft, coppery kiss. And then he pulls the sheets up over them and settles close.

Will sleeps for several hours, awakening in the late evening to the sound of voices. When he sits up, he realizes he's alone in bed, and it chills him more than the evening air when he slips out of bed.

Hannibal, he calls, pulling on a thread of an ever-present web. He feels like it's lived in him since he was born; that he's blindly dragged himself along it in the dark until he found Hannibal. He follows it now, downstairs in his robe and slippers, looking around his new home with forced interest.

He tells himself it's only temporary, this veneer of someone else's life. He keeps walking, following the phantom beats of his heart, and they get stronger the closer he gets to Hannibal. As if his heart were a compass, Hannibal his poles.

He finds him, and sighs in relief, pausing in the doorway.

Hannibal is speaking with the footman, the man's posture familiar now to Will. They're in what appears to be the drawing room, a high-vaulted room containing an extravagant piano and a beautiful velvet upholstered furniture set. The tall windows are tastefully dressed, and walls decorated with champagne colored paper.

Will hadn't paid much attention to the house when they arrived, but it is huge, bordering on tacky.

"Will." Hannibal looks up with a smile. His eyes are bright in a way that tells Will he won't be hungry for a *while*. Will licks his own lips.

Hannibal looks back to the footman and banishes him with a mutter, and then he raises a hand for Will.

"What do you think?"

"It's completely ostentatious."

"It is certainly in need of redecorating, I agree." He pulls Will close by the hand. Will scents the warmth under his skin and his fangs sharpen again. Hannibal's eyes take on the shine of adoration they often seem to when he sees Will is wrestling his new instincts.

"I was coming to find you."

"I didn't like waking alone, Hannibal," Will purrs back.

"And you do not like to watch me work, and so I left you to rest. Forgive me, I thought I would be finished before you awoke."

"Make it up to me," Will murmurs.

"Of course. Shall we return to the bedroom?"

"Yes, I think we ought to do that." Will's tone is as sharp as his teeth.

Hannibal steers him back toward the staircase with a smile. "I'm so neglectful, beloved."

"Thoroughly," Will agrees, affecting a mournful tone. A laugh bubbles up in his chest when Hannibal sweeps him off his feet and carries him to the staircase. As ever, he's effortlessly strong, entirely too charming to be perceived as anything other than a gentleman. The perfect predator.

He bears Will down onto the bed with a sigh. If he's the tiger, Will is undoubtedly his mate. He arches up to receive him, lips parting on his inhale when Hannibal turns his throat for inspection.

"Go on, beloved. Take what you want."

The scent of him is dizzy, hot bright life inside him. At first, Hannibal had told him, it was necessary for Will to continue to drink from him, to make the change permanent. That doesn't take into account the enjoyment it gives them both. Though Will would drink any amount of blood to keep his mind from turning into useless grey jelly. Hannibal says the process is nearly complete, and Will thinks he can *feel* it.

He's not sure he'll ever want to stop, though. Now, he licks carefully over the soft skin. He has to unbutton Hannibal's waistcoat and shirt to bare his throat sufficiently, though truly it bears doing for the sake of laundry.

Hannibal laughs softly. "Just take it off, Will. I'm yours for the night now."

"I was hoping you'd say that."

He was expecting it. Hannibal is nothing if not devoted. So devoted, it makes Will's throat tight. He peppers Hannibal's skin with kisses as he strips his clothing off piece by piece. His sighs are reward enough, but the promising hum under his skin, that's something else. He lets his own robe slip off his shoulders as he dips his head back down to that teasing thrum.

He's distracted momentarily by kisses, the twists and arches of their bodies as they shift together and tip to get comfortable. When Will is finally straddling Hannibal's hips, chests pressed together, he tips his head and lets his teeth pierce into that delightful flowing heat.

Hannibal's hand is anchoring on the back of his neck, fingers twined in the curls. He makes no sound even as Will begins to suck. But Will can feel his body against his own, and the bridging of his hips as Will groans around his mouthful. He seeks that closeness, just like they always do. Hannibal's free hand smooths up his back, keeping him steady as they rock slowly, Will still drinking deeply.

Hannibal's blood flows into his body like liquid flames. It's inebriating, lush and nourishing. It strengthens their bond with every droplet. And then, Hannibal gently squeezes, and Will pulls his mouth away with a low groan, breathing hard into Hannibal's shoulder as he gathers himself. He licks gently over the wound to seal it, but it's already starting to knit.

Hannibal tilts his chin up gently with his fingertips to kiss him. *My love*, he tells Will. The voice reverberates as if from inside Will's own throat, warm and reverent.

How much more do I need? Will replies, nuzzling under his chin.

"As much as you want," Hannibal murmurs aloud, "it wouldn't do either of us any harm."

"You know what I mean," Will tells him. "To keep myself - whole."

"It's difficult to say. I think you're likely out of the woods, but I'd rather be safe. I've never done this for anyone else." He kisses Will's brow gently. "And it's no hardship," he whispers.

Will sighs, settling against him completely, their cheeks together. "I feel more like you, when we do it. Like you're closer to me."

"Like I'm inside you?" Hannibal murmurs.

Will nods. "Like I can feel your heart beating beneath mine."

"Within it," Hannibal whispers back.

Will sighs, their cheeks sliding together. "Now that you mention it," he murmurs suggestively.

A low chuckle at that. "I did say I was yours for the night."

"Not much opportunity for such things on our voyage," Will laments.

In truth, Will had been miserably ill for most of it. The transformation he's been undergoing is hard on the body, and the trip from Britain to America, surrounded by steel and water, had been draining. But his lover's eyes have gauged every shade of pale and pound of flesh, and he's fed him diligently.

Now, Will feels energized and awake, and the feeling of Hannibal's body against his is so welcome. He kisses him with every ounce of hunger inside him.

They twist slowly to their sides, tangled in kisses and wandering hands, and Hannibal cups Will through his underwear with a sigh.

"My own, my love." Will nods shakily, clutching at his shoulder, as Hannibal shapes him with his hand. "My own perfect match."

"For all of time," Will whispers.

"Will," Hannibal breathes, "yes, for eternity."

He rolls them so Will straddles his hips, pulling him down for another long kiss. Will arches helplessly. He is entirely prepared to be shameless in his pursuit of pleasure, here in this new life. Hannibal seems to expect nothing less. He's urging Will's every movement, pulling at his shorts with a canny little smile.

"Next time," he purrs, "leave these off, my love."

"We'll throw them all on the fire," Will agrees.

"I'll build one specially."

Will laughs softly against his mouth. Hannibal's hands are already exploring his flesh and Will explores in turn.

Hannibal is warm and silky and hard all over, but especially where Will wants him.

"Hannibal," he pleads softly.

"Still room for more?" Hannibal teases.

"Always, with you." Hannibal twists to deposit him in the drift of pillows and Will can't help but laugh. "It's like being back on the boat."

"There are a few advantages," Hannibal chuckles.

"Show me some," Will sighs.

Hannibal guides his hands to the headboard, and tugs until he's fully, shamelessly stretched out. Will stays still for him, waiting to see what he'll do. He starts by kissing each wrist, forearm, each tender elbow bend. Will thinks perhaps he's following his pulse. He wriggles when he reaches the armpit, then skims across his collarbone.

"Hannibal," he pleads softly.

"Bend your knees," Hannibal instructs, mouth dipping down over his sternum to his soft stomach.

Will does as he's bid, feeling vulnerable with all his soft spots on show. But Hannibal kisses them all in turn. He makes Will feel safe, for all that he moves like shadow. He's everywhere,

and everything, lips finding Will's pale belly, and the tender insides of thighs. Will spreads them further at his urging. His face feels hot at the exposure.

"Hannibal-"

But Hannibal's lips then his tongue find the hot core of him. Will has to fold an arm over his face to keep himself quiet, body tensing under the sensation. He feels things more, now.

"Hannibal," he pleads softly. "You know what I want."

"And I will give it to you." He nips gently at the soft skin of Will's thigh, draws another shivery sigh out of him with the action. Then his mouth moves back down, opening Will up with steady presses of his tongue.

His hand curls around his cock, stroking slowly as he sucks and kisses below. Will's thighs shake as he rocks into it. When Hannibal turns him onto his front in a whirl, it renders him breathless. He lets out the faintest of groans.

It turns high and loud when Hannibal's mouth returns to him, unhindered by the angle of before. The sensation sings through him. He arches up with a helpless cry and rubs his hips against the mattress. Hannibal's hand is still gently working him, his mouth wetting him excessively, purposefully.

He lets Will frot against his palm, thumb swiping little arcs of fluid from the head. When he pulls back, he wipes it between Will's cheeks, and then his hands cover Will's hips.

"Will," he murmurs.

"Come on," Will encourages gently. "You know what I want."

"Yes, darling, I know."

Will hears him inhale, then exhale slowly. He's savoring. Shaky with anticipation, he arches, rocks back into Hannibal's grip. "Please, Hannibal."

His lover finally indulges him, shifting to kneel behind him. His warm weight is so comforting. His thick shaft presses against Will, then inside where Will wants him, the way just barely eased enough by his efforts before. It's slow, squeezing. Not an intrusion, a possession. Will lets out a harsh breath, reaching out for Hannibal's hand.

Hannibal links their fingers, another connection. He covers Will with his body slowly. They rock together into the soft embrace of the mattress. Will can't hold back a groan as he feels Hannibal slide deep.

"Oh-"

"Oh, yes?" Hannibal murmurs.

"Yes, yes," Will nods fast. He arches his back as much as he can. It's perfect, the way their hips are aligned, Hannibal's arms framing Will's shoulders. He moves slowly but every stroke

is satisfying. A deep, serpentine push and flex. Will feels surrounded. He tilts his cheek against Hannibal's with a soft cry.

Hannibal lets their cheeks rest together. His hips surge harder, deep and smooth. It's the perfect rhythm, a familiar pulse like a heartbeat, slow and constant and pounding.

Will moans Hannibal's name. He has to brace a hand against the headboard to bridge back into each forceful rock.

"Yes," he cries out softly.

Hannibal groans softly against his cheek.

"Mine," he breathes.

"Yours," Will repeats softly. Hannibal fills every sense he possesses, and Will is besotted, owned entirely. But Hannibal is bound in return.

Will has to twist to kiss him at the thought, dropping down onto one elbow and turning, and Hannibal lets him, hands securing his hip while they shift. His legs link back around Hannibal's waist, his arms around his neck. They surge together again.

Will can't help the series of noises that slip out of him, body alight with the feeling Hannibal drives to life inside him, hot and sparking gold. They twine together, mind and body. Will can't conceive of anything outside of this moment; their togetherness. They swallow one another's noises, as nourishing as anything he could imagine. As nourishing as the blood they share.

Will feels his body begin to tighten, to shake.

"Hannibal," he pleads.

In answer, Hannibal’s strokes become more forceful. Will is wracked with sensation, deafening, lightning up every nerve. It's a perfect storm. Shaking, he pushes a hand between them to stroke himself, breaths stuttering out at the sensation, Hannibal's own breaths becoming steadily harsher in turn.

"Will," he breathes, cupping his throat.

"Love," Will replies, pushing into it. "I miss the feeling of your teeth in me."

He hears Hannibal breathe out. "Will," he sounds winded by it.

"It's safe now, you know it is-"

"The point of me feeding you was to make *you* stronger..."

"You'll give me more later, then." Will gasps again, still stroking himself.

"Darling." Hannibal sounds so calm, put together. "I can never deny you a thing." He strokes over Will's throat with his thumb.

Automatically, he bears into it. His lover chuckles and replaces his thumb with his lips. The sinking pain makes Will wince. But it only lasts as long as a breath, until it melts into bliss. His hand moves faster without his conscious permission, jaw slacking on a moan. He feels his pulse thunder against Hannibal's lips, his cock slick with his own fluid.

With Hannibal still fucking him, the soft wet sucks of his mouth triggering a twist in Will's belly every time, it's barely seconds before he's spilling in a shuddering flood over his hand and stomach. He makes a ragged noise, arching up into his contact with Hannibal. It feels endless, roaring. He thinks he drifts away for the end of it, and comes to with Hannibal's hands stroking his hair, his lips bloodied and his eyes intent.

Will blinks up at him.

"I'm well," he says, quickly. He wraps a hand around Hannibal's wrist when he lifts it.

"Do you need-?"

"No, Hannibal. I'm fine. It wasn't the blood." He sighs as Hannibal cups his cheek. The kiss he gives him is soft and metallic. "Hannibal... did you-?"

"No," he murmurs.

"Then allow me?"

Hannibal smiles and nods. Will shifts, head a little light. It will get better as he moves around. Hannibal's hands steady him as Will slides slowly down his body. He curls a hand around Hannibal, taking in the sight of his hot, flushed length with a sigh. He's never so happy as when he's with him. Certainly happiest when he's with him like *this*. It feels like the Heaven he'd long given up on.

He strokes him on long, languid passes of his hand, kissing his chest and stomach. He likes feeling the heart pump their blood faster, imagines himself swirling through those branching hidden vessels. Being twined up in them like vines and enclosed within the Venus-fly-trap of Hannibal's ribs. He feels the caress of Hannibal's thoughts and knows he sees it too. Silently, he coaxes Will into a kiss.

Will keeps stroking, hand quickening. He can feel Hannibal's breaths quicken against his skin.

"Show me, my heart," he murmurs. He feels the way the words make him strain and pulse.

Hannibal spills into his hand. His fangs bared, he looks as much a nightmare as a dream, cherished nonetheless. Primal and perfect. Will sighs and leans up to kiss him. He gives him that moment to collect himself.

Finally, Hannibal cups his cheeks, dark eyes soft and bright.

"Will you take more blood now?" he murmurs.

"I feel fine, love. Maybe in a while?"

Hannibal hums in consideration.

"I feel *fine*," Will assures, smiling. He watches Hannibal's expression melt like honey.

"Very well. Later. But you'll rest with me now."

"All right," Will agrees readily. It's such a small request, and he could easily sleep more. "What's the plan now that we're here?"

"We should visit the museum tomorrow," Hannibal murmurs, stroking through Will's hair.

"And what will we do there?"

"We'll meet Doctor Fell's colleagues, and see what kind of exhibits he can suggest."

Will sighs into his shoulder. The smile Hannibal gives him extinguishes any of the creeping doubt. Hannibal is the picture of serene confidence.

"You're a bad man," Will whispers, albeit fondly.

"Not a man at all," Hannibal whispers back.

"Bad either way."

"Yes," Hannibal replies. "But I am happy, beloved."

"And I'm glad." He looks up into the chiseled, timeless face, committing every detail to memory, as has become his habit. "So am I."

*

Will is roused the next morning by the sound of pouring water. He blinks himself further awake, and is rewarded by the sight of Hannibal emerging from a tin bath, water running in long threads down the path of his chest and thighs.

"There's more water on the hearth for you," he murmurs when he sees Will watching him.

"Mm, I'll take yours."

"Then come and take it. There's something else for you too."

"Oh?" Will sits up, groggy but without the roiling ache he had at sea.

Hannibal picks up a delicate crystal wineglass and hands it to Will. Its contents are deep red and still warm.

"Oh…" He shuffles to the edge of the bed to drink it, sheets barely keeping him modest. As he raises it to his lips, he's held in its thrall for a moment, the scent and sweet heat beguiling. It's Hannibal's, he can tell at a sip. The thought warms him, and he holds the glass to his chest, gaze drifting back to Hannibal as he dresses. "Always taking care of me."

"It's within my best interests also, let me assure you. Go on, get in the bath."

Will drains the glass and then rises, leaving the sheet behind. Hannibal's eyes follow him as he pads to the hearth, sighing as he slips into the hot water. It's already scented with Hannibal's bath oil. Will settles, then turns his attention back to him, now disappointingly covered. He knows Will is disgruntled.

"I don't exactly know why we have to integrate ourselves," Will murmurs, "shouldn't we be keeping a low profile?"

"Why?" Hannibal asks, fastening his cufflinks.

"In case somebody is looking for you..."

"Who would be looking?"

"*Jack* would be looking."

"Jack." Hannibal sounds amused.

"You don't know him like I do, Hannibal."

"I don't need to know him. They all die the same."

The devil never doubts, Will supposes. The thought of Jack's death fills him with unexpected discord. It feels necessary, but Will and Jack have a history. Jack was the only person to ever show him goodness, even if it was to his own ends.

Where he's fastening his neck tie in the mirror, Hannibal glances at Will's reflection.

"Don't worry, my love."

Will tries to stamp out the seed of regret, ducking under the water to rinse. When he's finished, Hannibal brings him a robe, drying him delicately and then draping it around his shoulders. He kisses Will's cheek when he's wrapped up in it.

"We have plenty of time. I need to go and see to the staff, and write Chiyoh."

"How is she?"

"She's well, judging from her last letter. Of course, time has passed since then."

Will nods, leaning against him for a moment. "Of course. I'll get dressed and leave you to it."

"Very well. You know you can stay if you need to rest..."

"No," Will says quickly. Not in this house, not alone. Hannibal raises his eyebrows. "I'm not afraid," Will scoffs. "I just hate it."

"Why do you hate it?"

"It's gaudy and cold," Will says. "It doesn't feel like...us."

"What would feel like us?"

"Warmth, wood, fire."

Hannibal looks around, and Will feels the trickle of his displeasure. "I wanted you to be comfortable."

"I don't need a mansion to be comfortable," Will whispers.

"I thought you would be comfortable if you were with me."

Will turns away, face falling. Behind him, Hannibal's movements grow agitated. He braces himself. He ought to have guessed the devil would have a temper. He wonders what will bear the brunt of it.

Finally, Hannibal speaks, voice stiff. "How do I make it more to your liking?"

Will draws into himself even more at the tone, immediately wary despite all the confidence he felt last night.

"Will." Hannibal's hand on his shoulder is gentle, now. "Tell me." He turns Will around.

"Our house is full of strangers," Will mutters, "I'm used to keeping contained."

He feels a hand in his hair. "They can't hurt you. They wouldn't."

"I don't trust anyone but you."

"I'll get rid of them. We'll redecorate, and I can write for Chiyoh to join us?"

"Then what will happen to your - children?"

"I don't care about them, if you want her here."

Will *doesn't*, that's the problem. "I just want you."

He hears Hannibal breathe in, then out. His hands skim up Will's arms gently, expression solemn. "You have me. Forever."

"I want you," Will assures. "I know I don't know much about this life, yet, but I don't - need these distractions."

"I want you to have comfort, not distractions."

"Then give me yourself."

"I'm here. I'm yours. You need only tell me what it is you want, and I will do it. I will burn this house to the ground if that is what you ask, you know I will."

He looks completely sincere. Will bites his lip. It's appallingly tempting.

"Just don't make me have any balls," he whispers.

Hannibal bites his lip, and Will knows it’s against a smile.

"Very well, love." He cups Will's cheeks gently, stroking with his thumbs. "Will you come to the museum with me? It would mean a great deal."

"Of course I will."

"Thank you, beloved."

"You're welcome." Will leans into him. They stay close for a long few moments. The irrational agitation Will felt is melting slowly.

"Relax, I have you," Hannibal whispers, "and get dressed. I'll meet you in the foyer."

One more slow kiss, and Will obeys. It's good to have a moment alone to reorient himself with his fears. He's slow to let go of them, even in this new life. He thinks it would be foolhardy to release his hold entirely. Caution is still safety, in this world.

When he's dressed in one of the new suits Hannibal has pointedly left hanging for him, he makes his way quietly down the stairs, looking around at the old, stately home. It does have good bones, he can see that. Maybe just redecorating would help. Hannibal will be delighted. But maybe this place is only temporary, and he shouldn't worry so much. They'll talk it over, like they should have from the beginning.

Will admits he'd been happy to let Hannibal take the reins. He'd left London in a state of shock and distress. Guilt and foreboding are still his frequent companions, to be sure. He's not sure that will ever change completely. Hannibal has sheltered him from the worst of it though, which is more than Will could ever say for his old guardian.

Hannibal treasures him. Will has no intention of throwing that away. It's an unasked-for and unearned gift. And he cherishes it in turn.

He wonders what he could do to show Hannibal. Certainly go with him to the Smithsonian, and be on his best behavior. He gets his overcoat, resolved. Like he was waiting for his cue, Hannibal comes to join him in the foyer, neatly composed in his dark work suit, almost demure but for the distinguished beetle-shell green of his necktie.

"You look wonderful," Will whispers.

"As do you, my love."

Will supposes he does. Hannibal is much more knowledgeable than he on matters of dress.

"Come along." He picks up Will's hand and kisses his knuckles before opening the door and ushering Will outside. He hails a cab from the curb, effortlessly as always. They slide into the carriage together. Hannibal takes his hand once they're alone again.

"Nervous about your first day?" Will quips.

Hannibal chuckles good-naturedly. "Scared to death."

"You're being very brave." He keeps back the laugh with difficulty.

"It is challenging," Hannibal whispers.

"To expend so much power?"

"To restrain myself."

Will breathes out.

"What would you do?" He whispers. "If there were no one to take you to task?"

"Feast on the unworthy, build myself an army of servants, rule over this city."

A shiver climbs Will's spine like a specter on a staircase. Even after many weeks in Hannibal’s company, he still doesn’t always expect his honesty.

"Like you started in London," he whispers.

"I was in London for you."

"But before you had me-"

"I only came for you."

What he made for himself in London then... that was Hannibal not trying. The thought makes Will shiver slightly. He knows he's the only one to rein him in. He feels like he's a thin barrier between order and chaos. The only problem is, sometimes chaos sings to him too. A siren song, by which he is so frequently seduced. Hannibal's reaction is always thrilling. His own in turn is seldom expected. But he can see Hannibal's pleasure in it.

"Will?" Hannibal covers his hand with his own again.

Will squeezes his fingers. "Just thinking," he says quickly.

"Of us?"

"Always," Will says, honestly. "You must know that."

"I like to hear it again, on occasion."

"I'm always, always thinking of you."

Hannibal smiles at him, reaching out to cup his cheek. "And I, of you."

Will covers his hand with his own, sighing softly. He pulls the hand over to kiss its palm. He wishes they'd never had to leave their bed. Perhaps he'll suggest it. But Hannibal seems strangely buoyed by the whole venture, and Will doesn't have the heart to rob him of it, so he'll bide his time.

"What will you say of me?" he asks.

"I need say nothing," Hannibal reminds him. "Would you like me to call you my traveling companion, my bosom friend?"

"I think not."

"My lover, the moon of my world?"

"I'm sure that would go down well."

"It will be as I command it to be," Hannibal murmurs.

"Of course. Who could deny you?" But Will takes pity on him. "Call me your personal secretary if you must." Hannibal nods, and Will thinks for a moment. "Did you spell me?" He asks. "At any venture?"

"Never," Hannibal murmurs. He gives him a nasty little smile. "I didn't need to."

Will *wants* to be offended. But it's true, and there's little point denying it. He meets Hannibal's gaze evenly, rankling and hiding it badly.

"It's a good job, isn't it? You couldn't have kept me without my consent."

"I wouldn't have wanted to."

That might be a lie, but Hannibal sounds like he believes it. Will's turn to echo that mirthless smile.

"Wouldn't you?" Will bites his lip, smile turning knowing now. "You wouldn't have been able to."

"I know," Hannibal whispers. "This works better if we're both operating without misapprehension, Will."

"Agreed."

A smile, and Hannibal squeezes his hand again; turns it and kisses his knuckles. He kisses all the way up to his wrist, until Will laughs and snags his tie with his hand; snatches him in for a kiss. He can feel it reverberate through Hannibal's body. He cups Will's face in turn.

"This works. This will work," he whispers.

"It'll work," Will agrees softly. He doesn't need a card or an omen to know it.

The museum itself is a great sprawling stone affair, with striking architecture that puts Will more in mind of a castle than a scientific exhibit. Hannibal regards it with visible pleasure as he steps out of the carriage and comes around to hand Will out of his side, even though it's not necessary: Will knows it is to *him*.

It’s a novelty to have someone care. Hannibal does with each breath, and it never goes unnoticed. Will treasures them all. Even when his mind feels like a broken cup, he can still hold these little cares inside. Now, they stay close as they walk, and Hannibal takes his hand before they mount the steps.

Will has always loved museums, and this one is no different. Inside it's stately, overseen by a great whale skeleton. Hannibal by his side brings an extra sense of awareness. At this time in the morning, it's still quiet. There's a sense of anticipation in the large exhibit halls, vibrating off the tall ceilings and glass cases; trapped in the eyes of the mounted game on the walls.

Will looks around at the high ceilings; the rows of shelves and curios. The gleaming eyes always remind him of Hannibal now.

They only make it forward a few steps into the grand entrance before someone appears to greet them.

"Welcome," he murmurs, and Will is mildly startled to hear a real Southern accent again, so much so that his hand tightens on Hannibal’s sleeve unconsciously. "We are closed to the public today, do you gentlemen have an appointment?"

"My name is Doctor Roman Fell, I'm the new curator of Natural History,” Hannibal puts in smoothly, giving Will’s hand a gentle squeeze and not even pretending to hide it.

"Ah, Doctor Fell, my apologies. The director will want to meet with you shortly."

"No apology necessary, my husband and I are quite at our leisure."

Will's breath stutters, but the man doesn't even blink an eye. He shoots Hannibal a look when the man checks his pocket watch. He receives an inscrutable smile in return.

The man puts his watch away and looks up. "If you'll follow me to the director's office?"

"Much obliged, thank you sir." They follow, Hannibal's expression cat-like with satisfaction.

"I'm the head of security," the man adds. "Happy to assist you with access to anything you may wish."

"That's very kind of you," Hannibal replies demurely. As if Hannibal ever needed access to anything. Will trails them both, ears still hot from Hannibal's admittance, even to spelled ears. The security guard may be ignoring him, but Hannibal is smug.

Will can't help but smile back. Hannibal's delight is palpable.

They meander through the halls to the rows of offices beyond the public exhibitions, footsteps echoing on the marble flooring. It feels like Hannibal. Like a hunting ground. It's the perfect place for it, receiving a ream of passing customers every day.

It sends a bit of a thrill through Will as well, but he stifles it fiercely. He's not quite ready for that.

At the director's office, the security officer knocks on the door and announces them. They're called in immediately.

The director, a portly man with dark, curled hair and a friendly face, looks at Hannibal more like he's receiving the Pope than the curator of Natural History. He has a dark head of curls and a kind smile, and when he comes to shake Hannibal and Will’s hands in turn, he’s warm.

"Doctor Fell, it is an honor. I am Doctor Franklyn Froideveaux, we've of course corresponded."

"Of course. How delightful to meet you," Hannibal gestures. "This is my beloved, Will Graham. He's here acting as my... personal secretary."

"Welcome!" he beams, showing no obvious signs of Hannibal's influence but for his lack of shock.

"How do you do," Will greets. He seats himself quietly to the side, close to the desk, folding his hands in his lap.

"Please," Franklyn ushers Hannibal excitedly into the chair beside him. "Doctor Fell, I am so looking forward to discussing your exhibit plans."

"Likewise, though my ambitions are not for the faint of heart."

"You come most highly recommended, sir. I am sure we will be delighted."

"I hope so."

Will tries not to snort. The crux of it is, Hannibal actually does care about how his work is received. And there'll be hell to pay if it's not to his liking. Very literally. He eyes Hannibal at the thought, curious: even he's not sure what Hannibal's plans are, though by the sounds of things they’re entirely esoteric.

Either way, Franklyn seems to be enjoying the pitch, so Will lets his mind wander. Looking around the bright, handsome office with the many bookcases, he wonders what improvements Hannibal will make. He's sure there will be many, both large and small. He listens to Franklyn and Hannibal talk, and then gradually rises to go and examine a case of bird wings on the wall.

They're beautifully displayed. Overlapping, a stained-glass window of feathers and bright patterns. He longs to touch, to study the iridescence of the feathers. It reminds him of

Hannibal taking him to the back rooms of the museum back in London; showing him secrets.

He glances over his shoulder at his lover. He's watching him from the corner of his eye.

"We'd love a tour," he tells Froideveaux.

"Of course! And I can show you to your departmental offices."

"Thank you," Hannibal says politely.

"Not at all. If you'll follow me?" He stands, pleasant and beaming, and Hannibal and Will follow suit.

Hannibal takes Will's hand again. It's such a pure thrill, to be able to. He doesn't know what power Hannibal is expending to make it so, but it warms him immensely. It's a gift, he knows. One of many Hannibal has a mind to give. And of course, when it suits him, take away. But mostly, he's generous. When it's for Will.

Franklyn shows them around the museum and introduces Hannibal to his underlings – who all in turn learn Will is Hannibal's husband and don't even blink - before taking them to what will be Hannibal's new office. He bestows Hannibal with a heavy key ring with a little bow. Hannibal unlocks the door, smiling his small smile.

"Thank you, Doctor Froideveaux. That will be all for now."

"Of course! I'll let you get settled in." He bows again and shuffles out.

When he's gone, Hannibal goes to perch on the edge of his desk, rather smaller than the one in Franklyn's room, looking around the office. It is bright, and clean, and new.

"Adequate," Hannibal hums.

"Oh?"

"Could be larger," Hannibal replies, amused. "The director's office is larger."

"And yet... it is for the director."

"Precisely, my love."

Will tilts his head, smile plain with affectionate exasperation. "You're shameless."

"The devil has to be."

Hannibal holds out a hand for Will to come closer. Automatically he drifts into his space, their fingers linking. Hannibal pulls him against his side.

"Are you terribly bored, beloved?"

"Not at all," Will murmurs. "I enjoy watching people sway to you."

Hannibal smiles. "Some take less effort."

"Mmm, I'm sure." He raises a brow at Hannibal. "So I'm your husband."

"Spiritually? Emotionally? Of course."

"Of course," Will echoes.

"Does that displease you?"

"Not at all, perhaps the opposite."

"Perhaps." Hannibal smiles. He seems amused by Will's prevarication.

"I want that," Will murmurs.

"Do you?"

"Of course." He laughs softly. "Oughtn't the devil know a suitable ceremony?"

"It might not be anything you'd recognize."

"That's rather granted, isn't it?"

"I suppose." He kisses Will's brow. "Do you want to?"

"Want to what?"

"Recognize it?"

"Depends what you recognize it as."

"You know how I feel, Will."

"I want to know what you expect."

"I expect forever," Hannibal murmurs. "Losing you would be like losing a part of myself."

"That's good to know."

"Did you truly not know?" Hannibal murmurs.

"Hannibal... 'clear' is not I word I would ever ascribe to your motivations."

"I did not wish for things to be so, not between us."

"I have spent my life resisting you."

"I know," Hannibal replies. He cups Will's face gently in his hands. "I was waiting the whole time. Perhaps I am not transparent, but let that be."

Will nods helplessly. "Very well."

He knows. Of course he knows. He leans into Hannibal with a sigh, letting his arms encompass him once more. Hannibal means safety. And yes, Hannibal means love. Even if it's not the love Will was taught to expect. So many other lessons Will had learned have turned out to be wrong. He owes it to Hannibal to try and learn this one.

"Take me to see your new museum," he mumbles, resting his cheek against Hannibal's shoulder.

"Where would you like to start?"

"Wherever you like," Will murmurs.

"Our little nightmares, then."

Of course. "Lead on."

Hannibal guides him by the hand. Will walks beside him, soaking in his aura of calm interest. It's very restful to be beside him. The corridors of the museum embrace them, cool and quiet and stately. Hannibal draws him into the doors of the natural science wing.

They move through the rows of fossils in comfortable silence. Will likes to watch Hannibal cataloguing things in his head. Some are satisfactory, some seem to prompt a curious stillness for a moment, assessing. He doesn't always explain. Will doesn't exactly need him to. Hannibal's appraisal of predators is openly admiring. Yet he approves of the beautiful oddities too, the butterflies and birds and a great many pinned insects. It rather goes with the territory.

Will likes seeing the Doctor Lecter that he'd first met, the poised scholar. Even knowing what Will knows, he seems harmless here, even surrounded by the creatures of the night. It's the best camouflage. An angler in wait. And he's very patient.

Will knows the marks, himself. He suspects that Hannibal likes to be known. At least, by Will. And in turn, knowing him is a thrill.

"Let's return to Doctor Froideveaux's office, shall we, Will?"

Will tilts his head, surprised. "We only just got here."

"Well, it strikes me that we have endless hours to explore the collection, but unfinished business upstairs."

"Unfinished business?"

Hannibal just smiles. "Just follow me."

Will humors him, as is his wont. He rarely regrets it. And Hannibal is as filled with confidence as ever.

"Doctor Froideveaux," he announces himself with a brief knock when they arrive. "Might I have a word?"

The light, bustling voice calls him in.

"Doctor Fell, of course. Is there something the matter?" Franklyn asks, smilingly.

"Yes, Franklyn, there is," Hannibal replies evenly. "I've decided it would be better if I simply take over the museum directorship. Yet, here you still are."

Will raises his eyebrows, arms folded, as he watches Franklyn stutter. It's interesting, to watch the influence creep over him.

"Well, I - I suppose that... that makes sense," he says, slowly.

"You ought to write a letter," Hannibal says reasonably. "To the board, announcing your resignation and urging them to meet with me for appointment immediately."

Franklyn's eyes widen, but he's nodding. "No, of course, you're right."

Hannibal glances at Will, who once again raises a brow.

"You can borrow the curator's office to do it," Will puts in, simply.

"I'll walk you there, Franklyn" Hannibal murmurs, with every effect of kindness, "and we'll discuss a few more of your excellent ideas on the way."

“Of course, thank you.”

“Not at all.” Ushering him toward the door, he turns his attention to Will. "Wait here for me?"

"As always."

Hannibal flashes him a smile. Will smiles back, showing a hint of teeth. His heart feels over full. Hannibal is a force of nature. *His* force of nature. And he's bound by Will and Will alone.

In turn, Will has to bear in mind that he's already changing Hannibal: Franklyn is fortunate to be simply resigning from his post. He might be donating a pint of blood as well, of course. But he's not *dead*. At least, not yet.

Will looks around the office at the thought. Hannibal isn't wrong, it's a luxurious space, complete with a tea table, a chaise, a grand fireplace, and of course those many lovely bookcases. It will certainly suit him.

Will snorts and leans up against the desk, looking around at the art on the walls. There's a large study of The Creation of Adam hanging over the desk that is going to have to *go*. Though Will suspects Hannibal will find it amusing, if he hasn't noticed it already. He will have, though. He notices everything.

Even entertained as he is, Will’s attentions are eventually drawn back to the bird wing shadow box by the door, eyes following the feathers; the threads and weaves. It's a lovely little thing. A strange impulse seizes Will, and he goes to the frame, sizing it up. He touches the corner with his finger. Then, he lifts it off the wall completely.

Hannibal, of course, walks in at that moment. His eyebrows raise, enquiring.

"I like it," Will says defensively.

"I'll have it couriered to the house," Hannibal says simply. He'll build room decor around it, Will knows. They exchange smiles.

"So," Will diverts, putting the frame down on the floor, "what next?"

Hannibal paces closer, hands finding Will's shoulders. "Next, we celebrate."

Will inhales, the scent of wool and copper curling into his nostrils. "How do we do that?"

Hannibal gives him another crooked smile. "I have a few ideas."

"Show me."

"I would be delighted."

He reels Will in for a kiss. It's forceful, not waiting for permission. It's implicit. Will slides his fingers into his hair with a soft groan.

"You look well in this room, beloved," Hannibal whispers against his jaw.

"Do I? Why's that?"

"You are the finest work of art I can imagine."

"You have an eye for it."

"I do. Now I want to see more of you."

"How much more?"

"All of you, beloved. Every inch."

Will bites his lip on a grin. "You're terrible."

"It's somewhat in the name."

"*Hannibal*," Will whispers.

"Beloved?"

"Take me," Will orders. Sees the way Hannibal’s pupils dilate at the words, and oh, how Will thrills at the power he holds over him.

All at once, Hannibal moves, surging Will toward the desk with a faint snarl. Will absolutely doesn't resist.

Instead, he lets himself be borne back onto the stately desk, Hannibal crowding between his knees, only stepping back to rip the trousers and underthings down his legs. He undresses Will with indecent speed, leaving the shirt, waistcoat and jacket splayed open on the desk like snakeskin shed.

"Hannibal, if someone comes in-"

"They will not."

He kisses Will again, stifling any further hesitance. Will moans softly. His own hands work frenetically at Hannibal's flies; his outer layers and the buttons of his shirt. He likes the image of the pristine suit, disturbed. Hannibal’s hair is already starting to fall forward out of its aggressive styling, deliciously displaced. Will displaces it further with a possessive hand.

"I love you," he breathes, tugging Hannibal down into a kiss.

"Eternally," Hannibal murmurs back. He bows his head to kiss Will's chest, hands cradling his flanks. His thumbs press gently against his ribs.

Will bridges into it, breathing hard. Hannibal's mouth is everywhere, and his teeth pinch teasingly in sensitive spots.

"Hannibal," he breathes.

"Yes, beloved?"

"I want to taste you."

"Then open your mouth," Hannibal murmurs, circling around the desk so Will can tip his head over his shoulder and take him in.

It's a harsh, suffocating press, but Will meets it greedily. Hannibal holds the back of his head, thrusting in with little help from Will. That triggers a gasping little gulp, but Will doesn't let up. Hannibal can have whatever he wants.

Tasting him, feeling him press inside, it fills Will with a frantic, yearning heat. He swirls his tongue, over and over. Hears Hannibal's soft hiss of breath as he rocks into his throat. Will moans softly. Then he pushes Hannibal back to take a breath; regain control of his sense of gravity for a moment. He can't help but suck at the head of Hannibal's cock even so.

Love the way you taste, he thinks. Hears Hannibal's answering groan.

"Your mouth is so velvety hot," Hannibal murmurs. "Only your body could feel so right."

He strokes Will's cheeks as he nudges in again, pressing deep enough to choke him, waiting for him to yield despite his streaming eyes and flickering throat. Will doesn't yield easily, never has. But he grasps at Hannibal's hips, and keeps breathing, and lets him move.

Saliva drips from the corners of his mouth. He chokes every time Hannibal slips too deep, but he doesn't want him to stop. He idly palms his own cock where it rests against his belly.

"Oh, Will," Hannibal sighs. He touches the corner of his mouth. Then cups his cheek as he pulls back. "Ready for more?" he murmurs.

Will nods quickly, struggling to catch his breath. Hannibal shifts again, hands finding his hips. Will pants dizzily as he watches him, wiping his mouth and moving with Hannibal's hands.

Hannibal pushes his knees up. Nudging them over his forearms, letting Will reach down between their bodies to guide him against his hole with shaky hands.

Will hisses as he pushes in. His back arches, toes curling as Hannibal braces his palms against the desk, pressing Will's knees back as he sinks deeper. It’s not quite slick enough, but it’s still perfect. No hesitation, just a joining, and a quick and bright pleasurepainpleasure. Will is taken over by the bruising pressure of it; the rightness of Hannibal inside him. Complete as he possibly can be.

He grips at Hannibal's shoulders as he starts to snap his hips, setting a relentless pace. Will looks up at the elegant vaulted ceiling above him. The creation of Adam, looking over them. He feels like something new as well - something treasured and perfect. Made in Hannibal's image.

He looks back to the familiar features above him. Reaches up to touch his cheeks. He gasps in breaths between thrusts.

"Harder," he whispers, "I want to feel you for days."

"I want to hear you," Hannibal murmurs in reply.

"Then you better go harder." Will lets his eyes sparkle challengingly. Relishes the expression on Hannibal's face; delight and adoration. He sees it often, never takes it for granted.

Now, as Hannibal drives his hips hard enough the desk shakes, Will is more grateful than ever. He groans, hearing something rattle to the floor.

"Yes, Hannibal, *please*-"

Hannibal growls softly. His knuckles whiten on the edge of the desk over Will's shoulders, body moving smooth, all sinew and pale skin. He looks animalistic like this. Savage, demonic. Will adores his bared fangs; his snarling breaths.

He bares his own. "*Harder*."

Beneath Hannibal's hands, the wood of the desk splinters under his strength. Will almost thinks he sees the extension of dark wings. He bucks up frantically, and the desk protests. Hannibal's strokes are fast and precise, slicking with every rock. Will moans again, voice going full-throated. His cock aches, leaking fluid against his belly, swaying heavy with every rock.

"This is all yours," Will whispers.

"Mine," Hannibal snarls. The very edges of his monstrous form are bleeding out, like a flicker in the corner of Will's focus; dark eyes and great jaws and clawed fingers. Storm clouds are pressing against the panes of the tall windows. Will is so enthralled; overcome and grateful for it. He lets it fill him like a billowing sail. Hannibal is still driving into him, making his toes curl and his body sing. A cry bursts out of him on every rock. He's helpless before it, as always.

"Hannibal," he repeats it, a quick, desperate plea.

"Show me," Hannibal growls.

Will clutches his hair as his thighs start to tremble. He pulls their mouths together again. His moan is helpless and raw as the white hot need in his belly starts to unspool.

It lasts forever; when he opens his eyes and the building is still standing around them he's honestly surprised. Hannibal is panting above him, expression serene despite the chaos around them.

"Go on," Will urges him. "Make your mark."

"Haven't I already, beloved?"

"There are more ways than one to do it," Will whispers.

Hannibal nods, and slowly bows his head, lips touching Will's throat. Will breathes out slowly. He strokes Hannibal's hair, hips kicking a little in response to Hannibal's lazy motions now. It feels so good, even the little threads of overstimulation. Against his jugular, Hannibal's jaws stretch. The part of him that exults at blood rises up to the surface. At the same time, Hannibal's teeth sink below it.

Will cries out, full-throated. He's pierced in more ways than one, relishing every point. Relishing the way he can feel Hannibal quake. No one else could ever shake him. With that, he feels his hips start to work faster once more.

Will groans in encouragement. It's dizzying, overwhelming Will's already ravaged nerves, but he can't help but crave more. He knows himself and he knows he'd let Hannibal do anything to him. He thinks it's entirely mutual. He wraps himself tighter around Hannibal, surging up hard. When he comes, Will feels it even outside of the stifled groan.

It flows through each place they're connected. A pulsing current of conjoined pleasure. Perfect in its very excess. Will feels like he's lucid dreaming, fire flooding his insides, the devil looming over him. It's hot and vicious and perfect.

Slowly, breathlessly, Hannibal sinks down against him. Will kisses his cheeks and brow. They're both frosted with sweat, chests heaving. Will feels a smile wreathing his face.

"We've made a mess, love."

"Marked our territory."

"It's all our territory," Will says boldly, knowing it will delight his lover.

"The whole world," Hannibal agrees softly, "anything you could desire."

"That's just you, Hannibal."

"Sweet thing." His eyes are molten with warmth.

Will beams at him softly. "Let's go home now," he suggests.

"Let's." Hannibal kisses the center of his chest.

After cleaning up as best they can, they put their clothing to rights and make ready to leave. Hannibal regards the desk with amusement.

"A good excuse for a new one."

"I'll say," Will snorts. He looks around the office once more, sees the shadowbox. "Technically, you know, that's stealing."

"Is it? I'm the director now. I'd call it donating." He strokes Will's curls out of his eyes. "They remind me of you. Of when we met."

"Me too," Will murmurs. He leans to kiss Hannibal once more. "I love you," he whispers.

"And eternally, I love you," Hannibal murmurs. He holds his hand out to Will. "Shall we?"

Will takes it. "Let's."

They leave the beautiful, mussed office together.

*

Later that night, after some discussion of redecorating has been had and the shadowbox has been hung in their room for the time being, Will orders a bath to be brought up to their room: both of them are still slightly disheveled outside of rudimentary cleanup. Hannibal always enjoys a nice hot bath. Especially if it contains Will.

They sink into the water together, at opposite ends of the great tub. Hannibal has set a record playing on his phonograph. The music rises and falls like ocean waves around them. Will lets his eyes drift closed. He's quite content to breathe in the scent of Hannibal's bath oils and feel the water lap at his skin.

"I must admit, Will," Hannibal starts, "you've taken to this life more easily than I would have ever dared hope."

"Easily," Will laughs softly.

"Readily," Hannibal corrects. He caresses Will's calf idly. "But I should have known. You're so very brave."

"Brave," Will sighs, "I'm not sure that's it."

"I am."

That prompts a little laugh. "Well, who am I to argue."

"The only one who could."

Will smiles. "That was quickly obvious."

"It does me good."

"To have a devil's advocate?" Will teases.

"As it were." He looks unamused by the joke, but Will doesn't care. "Though I can't quite speak for your prowess as an advocate, Will."

"Would you like to be able to?" Will murmurs.

"That depends."

"On what, Hannibal?"

"On what you mean by that."

"I'd like to know what I could do for you, love."

"I want for nothing."

"Yes, but you have to have thought about it."

Hannibal considers, his thumb rubbing over Will's knee gently. "You are... reluctant to engage in hunting behaviors of your own, I notice."

Will makes a face. He'd been so sick for so long. "I have time, don't I?"

"That you do," Hannibal allows.

Will shrugs slightly. "I needed your blood before. Not sure I'm ready to be without it."

"Luckily, that is something I'm willing to continue to provide."

"And I'm grateful." He hesitates. "But you want me to hunt."

"I was simply curious as to whether you had thought about it."

"I have, on occasion," Will murmurs.

"What do your reflections yield?"

"I like watching your face change when you do it," Will murmurs.

"What do you see?"

"Teeth, and wings, and endless clouds of smoke," Will whispers. "A crown of bones. Blood." He swirls his fingers through the water again. "So much blood."

Hannibal's smile is tucked; pleased. "And how does it make you feel?"

"It makes me feel... humbled. Awed."

"By me?"

"Yes. Your power."

He watches Hannibal's face as he says it. The flicker in his gaze is unmistakable. Will offers him a smile.

"It's power you are entirely in possession of, Will. Something we can share."

"I don't feel it," Will admits.

"It will come, in time." He sounds very sure.

Will smiles, cupping Hannibal's calf under the water, luxuriating in his vulnerability. He feels their connection very strongly, like this. Like they're in some womb, new and naked. And together - always together.

"Come here, beloved," Hannibal whispers.

Will shifts, water singing off his skin. When he settles against Hannibal's chest, legs neatly tucked up in the tub, he sighs in relief he didn't know he was waiting for. He should have known all along. He rests his head against Hannibal’s shoulder with another long breath.

"Hannibal," he sighs.

"Will?"

"This is what I needed."

"I'd wager a little relaxation was in order after earlier exertions, yes." His tone is dry, and Will glances up to see his expression. Smiling.

"I liked those too."

"Gratified but unsurprised." Hannibal kisses his forehead. "Are you ready to retire?"

Will nods. "I'm ready."

They get out of bed and dry off, and Hannibal is just sliding a robe on when there's a knock at the door. Will sighs. Hannibal crosses to the door and opens it slightly, taking a folded letter from the butler. He closes the door again with a murmur of thanks, opening it up and scanning the contents briskly, then pausing.

"Will," he says eventually, "it seems your instincts were correct."

Will looks up from tying his own robe, pushing wet curls back from his forehead. "What's happened?"

"My contact in New York has just sent word that a Mister Jack Crawford came through Customs yesterday."

Curiously, Will doesn't feel the same fear he once might have. It's there, but it glances off him like rain on an umbrella.

"Then he's looking for us."

"He is. But even with his resources, I expect it will take him some time to find us."

"That depends."

"On what, my love?"

"On how many bodies we've left behind."

"You are being pointed again, Will."

"You're being smooth."

But that is Hannibal, to a ‘T’. His smile now has the quality of buttered ice.

"We'll have to come up with a plan," Will says.

"I have a plan."

"Well, then. Tell me?"

"Kill Jack Crawford," Hannibal says silkily.

And Will knows, this time, that it's the only solution. And the reason for Hannibal's keenness for him to improve his *hunting*. It's their fate. Will simply has to accept it.

"Then that's what we'll do," he murmurs.

Discarding the letter, Hannibal takes Will's hands in his own, raising his knuckles to his lips. He emanates pride and pleasure as, expression exultant, he turns Will's hands and kisses the pale, delicate skin of his inner wrists.

"Then we had better get you some practice."

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